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The Canada Council
Conseil des Arts du Canada

[Statements and speeches]

Music Development in a
Restrained Economy

Notes for an address
to the Annual Conference
of the Canadian Music Council
Guelph, Ontario
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By Charles Lussier, Director,
The Canada Council

Your organizers and the press have billed this as my "maiden speech" to the arts community. I hope this does not mean I am expected to exercise quaint and maidenly restraint in tackling your topic "music in a restrained economy."*

A few years ago, when I served on the board of the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde, I was told in no uncertain terms that my contribution was welcome, and that everything would go well, on one condition: that I stay away from the footlights. I do not feel so constrained today. Our business at the Canada Council is money for the arts, humanities and social sciences, and I do not think you have asked me here to speak in pretty generalities. Speaking of money, I think it delightfully germane to your topic that my old friend Nicholas Goldschmidt, with his usual flair, should have scheduled the Beggar's Opera last night. The people who approach us for funds may at times feel like beggars, though we certainly do not regard them as such. But the term is quite fitting for us when we go to the federal Treasury Board on our annual pilgrimage to plead our clients' case for more money from Parliament.

Seriously, I do not have to underline, for this audience, that the arts in Canada, if not beggared, are at least in financial trouble. Not as a result of bad planning or foolish spending, but partly because we have come through a period of exciting and necessary - but expensive - growth, and partly because the federal government has launched an anti-inflation program to halt the "accelerando" of prices and wages.

*Conference theme: "Music in a restrained economy - from proliferation to consolidation."

And so we have reached a time of "consolidation," as your conference planners have put it. I am most interested and encouraged that you have chosen to examine the effects of this austerity in your conference workshops. And I am guessing that you may be expecting some answers, or at least suggestions, from me on the kinds of questions that have come up today. After all, though the Canada Council is by no means the only, nor the largest single supporter of the arts on the national scene, I think it is safe to say it is the most visible, and perhaps the one from whom most is expected.

There is perhaps one thing salutary in being forced to exercise financial restraint. It does demand that one reexamine roles, objectives and priorities. The Council has recently begun to do this, and while I cannot give you a point-by-point report, I would like to indicate at least some of the general directions in which we are moving. These directions may alter in a field as fluid and dynamic as the arts, and I hope you, as professionals, will be free with your suggestions and criticisms.

This Guelph Spring Festival is a good example of what can be done in a time of tight budgeting. Obviously it has been accomplished, in large part, through the dedication and organizing genius of Nicholas Goldschmidt and a group of devoted volunteers. Such selfless work on behalf of the arts is occurring in many parts of the country, and it gives us heart when we examine our rather ominous-looking budget sheets.

Briefly, the Council's budget position for the arts is this. Next year we shall be able to spend some \$36.3 million on activities in theatre, music and opera, dance, writing, publishing and the visual arts. This compares with \$32.3 million last year, an increase of about 10 per cent. However, if we deduct the special \$1 million grant for travel costs of arts groups and individuals that will be performing at the Olympics, the increase in our regular programs will be less than 10 per cent. As we have stated repeatedly, most large arts organizations have forecast cost increases of much more than 10 per cent. So in fact the amount we shall be able to give them in the coming year represents a drop in the real dollar value of our support. The upshot for many organizations will be reductions in staff and in the number and scale of productions, experimental programs, or training and outreach community activities. Financial constraints will also hamper development plans that the Council has been watching with the same mixed feelings of delight and apprehension as would be felt by a financially stretched father at the prospect of his well-loved but rather plain child suddenly blossoming into a beautiful, highly popular and terribly expensive young woman.

As a result, the Council will have to examine, even more rigorously, the budgets and proposed programs of the established arts organizations that rely on it for support. We

shall also have to look closely at our grants to associations such as the Canadian Music Council, the Association of Canadian Orchestras, and others. We feel that these "indirect" expenditures are justified. But we must also face the fact that every dollar spent on associations means a dollar less for the artist-in-training and the practising artist. In times of financial cutbacks, therefore, further growth in indirect expenditures of this kind may be undesirable.

In many ways, the new stringencies may turn out to be just one more challenge for performing arts organizations. They have grown used to "making do." We shall see changes. But I am confident that we shall not see any lessening of creative energy, even though it may appear in different forms. I am not suggesting that orchestras and theatre companies should go back to playing in barns and gymnasiums for no pay, as one young dancer angrily accused us of implying not long ago. On the contrary, the Council's position, which I wholeheartedly endorse, has always been that the arts are an essential ingredient of life, and that those who provide this ingredient are entitled to a decent living and good working conditions. Yet we are painfully aware that artists still lag far behind most of their countrymen in the amount of hard cash they are able to get for their work.

We at the Council are doing everything we can to speak out on behalf of artists and arts organizations, and we shall continue to present strongly-argued cases for more support from

the federal treasury. But we shall need help from all of you, and from all Canadians, to show that what has been achieved so far is of real interest to a large part of the population, if not the majority, and has wide public acceptance. In the meantime, we hope that boards of management, and artists themselves, will be inventive, as they have been in the past, in looking for ways to ensure that no artistic ground is lost and progress continues to be made.

Arts professionals and administrators often complain that the arts are still regarded as a frill in our society. In many circles, no doubt they are. But we know that people have always expressed themselves through some kind of artistic activity, which has been a means of communion with themselves, their fellows and their God. I suggest, therefore, that no one who really comprehends what self-expression through art means would place the arts in the position of a "frill."

One of our most important tasks, then, in my view, is not simply demanding acceptance of the arts as an essential ingredient in our society, or as a right of practising professionals to make a living by their art. It is rather to broaden the base of understanding, acceptance - and love - of the finest in art through education and regular contact, and through opportunities for everyone to practise the art that is in him.

High artistic quality is often related to professionalism, and for this reason the Canada Council has always devoted the major

part of its arts budget to the support of professional artists and arts organizations. This is as it should be, and I make no apologies for it. However, it is becoming increasingly clear that unless our professional artists have credibility in the community, in that they can be seen to provide meaningful insights into the lives and experiences of people, support from public funds will not rise appreciably in the future. Prospects of increased government support, therefore, probably depend, more than anything else, on the emergence of a well-informed and art-conscious public whose priorities will in time be reflected in the policies advocated by our elected representatives, and ultimately in party platforms and government programs. In the Council's support of "excellence," therefore, we see "excellence" to be not entirely in the quality of the initial product; it is at least partly in the received and perceived quality of its use and enjoyment. This we increasingly regard as an essential part of our mandate to the people of Canada. As a consequence, we are moving towards greater emphasis on community participation and seeking effective - if indirect - ways of promoting arts education for both children and adults.

The Council already has some programs aimed in these directions, and most of them are known to you. The Explorations program that we set up in 1973 is open to anyone, not just the professional, who has an imaginative and innovative idea and the ability to carry it through. Two recent Explorations awards in

music, which show the range of this program, are the Cape Breton Fiddle Music project, which will collect and record traditional fiddle tunes, and the Eckhardt-Gramatté competition in Winnipeg for young composers and performers of contemporary Canadian music.

The Council also provides indirect assistance to non-professionals or community groups in music by giving grants for conductors and coaches, music festivals, choirs, youth orchestras, jazz and folk festivals, summer schools and workshops. We all know, however, that the assistance we give is small, measured against the tremendous amount of music-making that is already going on across this country. I am reminded, for example, of the one province of Saskatchewan where, as Mossie Hancock reports in The Canada Music Book, there are over 40 music festival centres, embracing some 450 communities, and including 80,000 participants a year, in a province whose population is less than one million. The Junior Concerts of Saskatchewan, the Jeunesses musicales du Canada and the Organization of Saskatchewan Arts Councils - all tour established professional musicians, many of whom hold lecture-recitals in small communities. The vigor of community music life in most provinces is exhilarating. We know that sometimes even a small amount of grant money to pay for the services of just one professional can lead to a whole world of change and delight for a small community.

This leads me to the announcement of a new music program that has just been approved by the Canada Council.

The Council has been concerned for some time that gifted and competent artists are often forced to find work in other countries or to supplement their incomes in large cities with work outside their profession. We have also been concerned that small communities in remote areas are rarely fortunate enough to have well-trained professionals in residence there. Nor do they have the opportunity to receive, except infrequently, the visits of good performing companies.

We are therefore setting up what is, in effect, an extension of our artists-in-residence program. A community group or institution, such as a church or arts council, will be able to apply for and receive the services of a professional musician. The Council will establish a bank of artists - composers, instrumentalists, singers, and chamber music ensembles - and it will evaluate applications for artists from community organizations. The organizations will be judged according to their ability to support and extend the work of the professional "community musician" and implement the projects and programs.

The Council approved, at its March meeting, the expenditure of \$100,000 for the coming year for this program. As you can see, this will be a modest undertaking at the start. We can provide, depending on need, 9 or 10 grants of from \$10,000 to \$15,000 each to "community musicians." We can also fund short-term "visiting musicians" at up to \$500 a week for an

average of five weeks. The accent in this first year will be on flexibility, until we get a clearer picture of what the needs are.

We are looking forward to receiving applications from small communities for these artists. We see the program as one of great benefit not only to the communities but also to the artists themselves. We think they will find the work rewarding, both in artistic and personal terms. Many city-bred musicians will find to their delight, as some of you may have already found, that there are great talents there to discover, nurture and promote. Judging from the number of fine musicians who have come from small or medium-sized towns or who have gone to teach there, it is obvious that a healthy musical life exists outside our metropolitan centres. We hope, in a small way, to encourage the good work that is already being done.

In the discovery and teaching of young talent the Council continues to be concerned about the inadequacies of the school system. The picture remains bleak in a world in which, according to the recent report World Military and Social Expenditures 1976, nations are spending an average of \$12,330 a year to equip each soldier and only \$219 a year to educate each school-age child.* The educators among you know that precious little of even that \$219 goes toward music education, or arts education of any kind, in the schools. But if we want our schools to help us build the audiences of the future and to give potential

*The Ottawa Citizen, March 1, 1976

artists an opportunity to develop, we must mount greater pressure on ministries of education to include more hours in curricula for the arts - not after school when the child is tired - and more funds for teacher training and equipment. As a national body, the Canada Council has no mandate to fund or to advise on education programs directly. But we can, and do, fund studies in education. You may know, for example, that Helmut Blume is doing a study of professional music training for us at present, and we, ourselves, are looking at the current state of arts education in the primary schools, particularly at the vital grade 4 to 6 level. We shall be sympathetic to any possible ways to encourage action in this field.

If Canada is doing badly in its support of music education it is doing infinitely worse in support of its composers. The Canada Council gives assistance through programs of aid for the commissioning of works by Canadian composers, for the publication and promotion of Canadian music, and through a joint program with the CBC for young composers. But we are concerned that there are not enough opportunities for composers to have free periods for composition alone. We are therefore looking at the possibility of long-term support. As an experiment, we are about to begin a three-year program for writers. The results will be monitored closely, and if the program works well, it may be extended to other arts disciplines, including music.

But musical composition and the development of good composers depends on works being performed, heard, and understood. And in this the potential of the electronic media is staggering, when you consider that our country has the longest broadcasting networks in the world, that 96.6 per cent of households own at least one television set, and that 22.5 million people are covered by the CBC AM network alone. The recent announcement by the federal Communications Minister that provinces may set up independent agencies for general broadcasting should encourage the programming of more Canadian music, drama and literary readings.

But I think all of us must give much stronger support to artistic directors and producers in radio and television who are trying, within budget constraints and against fierce competition, to provide more arts programming and hence more employment for practising Canadian artists. It is sometimes argued that large-scale television productions are prohibitively expensive for a country of our size. It does seem to me, however, that we could be given more modest but still excellent and original fare. On radio, for example, we could have more chamber opera, even grand opera, which you'll remember the CBC gave us in those memorable years in the 50s. Also on radio we could have more solo and chamber music recitals, plays and readings from regional centres, and so on. Perhaps our taste for bigness - such as for the 350-horsepower automobile engine, which is going

to be legislated out of existence - has got to be drastically modified. Is it possible that the day of the proliferation of big productions, big performing arts companies, big luxurious opera houses and museums is passing?

Naturally, we should try to preserve the fine organizations we have. However, the reality today is the declining value of the dollar, and the need to make fixed resources go a long way. More than before, perhaps, the Council is torn by the perennial dilemma of providing adequate aid to fine large groups on the one hand, and encouraging new, untried effort on the other. This dilemma cannot be solved easily. It is the stuff of which our nightmares are made.

As my predecessor André Fortier has pointed out, there is little likelihood that our various levels of government will find it possible in the foreseeable future to increase their support to the arts at a rate consistent with expected needs. I think, however, that they can be persuaded to make greater efforts in this direction if we build a more solid base of interest and if there is more vigorous lobbying by artists and arts administrators themselves. We are looking, anxiously, for this kind of action. I have to report, I'm afraid, that when we recently wrote to some 400 arts organizations that we support, announcing the restrictions on grants for the coming year, to our knowledge only one - the Globe Theatre in Regina - wrote to the Prime Minister protesting the effects of the austerity program.

The government has no automatic pipeline of information from the arts world. If artists expect informed behavior from government, they and their friends must do the informing.

But even with increased government aid at all three levels, and greater corporate and foundation support, as is given by bodies such as the du Maurier Council for the Performing Arts, we shall still need healthy grassroots activity. And if enough Canadians display the energy and creativity they have shown in the past, this decade could be as exciting in its own way as the big spending era of the 60s.

I trust, therefore, that you are not taking the word "consolidation" in your conference theme to mean there will be no growth; that at a time of fiscal restraint we should gather our metaphorical skirts about our knees, sit tight and hope for a return to freer spending! I should like to think, rather, that we can take "consolidation" to mean a reordering of priorities and a re-direction of forces; that this will be a time of rediscovery of the adventurous spirit that has always characterized our people at times of crisis and change. Eldon Grier called the tune well in his poem "An Ecstasy", which Istvan Anhalt set to music for centennial year. In a time of "grayness" and "confused improvisation," he said, "let us hear our voices again."

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